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IMLS awards \$331,054 grant to VMFA for conservation education initiative

Funds to support training, diversity and statewide outreach in conservation



Congressman A. Donald McEachin (VA-04) visits the Susan and David Goode Center for Advanced Study in Art Conservation at VMFA on September 19, 2017.

From left: Jeanie Tucker, VMFA Intern; Ainslie Harrison, Assistant Conservator for Sculpture and Decorative Arts; Stephen Bonadies, Senior Deputy Director for Conservation and Collections; Congressman A. Donald McEachin (VA-04); Casey Mallinckrodt, Assistant Conservator of Sculpture and Decorative Arts.

The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts will use a \$331,054 grant—announced today from the Institute of Museum and Library Services—to support the “Connect to Conservation” program, a three-year effort that will expand educational offerings and outreach from the museum’s Susan and David Goode Center for Advanced Study in Art Conservation. Under the grant, VMFA will engage students from diverse backgrounds in pursuing conservation careers; provide training and professional development for postgraduate professionals; and share collections care knowledge with museums across the Commonwealth.

This initiative builds on VMFA’s strategic investment in the Goode Conservation Center, which moved into a newly designed nearly 10,000-square-foot space in 2010 when the expanded museum reopened. After outfitting the studios with specialized conservation technology and tools for object-based research, the museum then focused on expanding its in-house

team of conservators. Construction and equipment for the expanded center totaled \$6 million.

“VMFA has developed an outstanding conservation program, and this grant allows us to embrace our responsibility to develop a generation of diverse conservators and share our expertise with colleagues,” VMFA Director Alex Nyerges said. “By further opening our doors as a training ground and taking our scholarship and knowledge to other venues, we are showcasing the great work under way at VMFA and expanding our reputation as a leader in art conservation.”

This initiative will kick off in October 2017 with specific goals:

- **Attract diverse candidates to conservation careers.** Industry research shows that conservation is one of the least diverse disciplines in the museum field. As VMFA works to build a team and develop exhibitions and related programs that reflect the communities it serves, this grant will support paid training opportunities and introduce conservation as a career opportunity to a more inclusive pool of applicants. By recruiting undergraduates—including those at historically black colleges and universities—for 10-week internships during their first two years of study, VMFA will assist those who discover a passion for conservation in choosing the best courses in both sciences and humanities. Interns, assigned in pairs to painting, paper or object conservation, will work in tandem with the museum’s conservation professionals. Over three years, VMFA will hire 12 undergraduate students, who also will receive support in preparing their portfolios for graduate school, ongoing mentorship, and insights about the museum’s broader operations.

- **Offer fellowships for postgraduates.** Advanced training and in-depth, multifaceted conservation projects will help new conservation graduates enhance their skills and knowledge of the workings of a major museum. The fellows also will publish or present on a specific project in professional journals or conferences; assist in planning and implementing major exhibitions; travel to other museums for research; and develop and present at new collections care workshops offered by VMFA. The fellowship is designed to help participants develop leadership skills and build collaborative relationships across departments. VMFA will hire two fellows for two-year appointments.
- **Share knowledge and expertise.** VMFA plans to partner with the Virginia Association of Museums—the nation’s largest state museum service organization—to present two hands-on collections care workshops, taught by the museum’s senior conservators and fellows. Topics will focus on preventive conservation and collections care, aligning with VAM’s efforts to support their members’ need for and interest in object-based training for collection care, as well as methods to improve collections storage. The series will include a basic and advanced workshop on each topic.

The grant is funded by the IMLS Collections Stewardship Program, which supports investments in professional development for museum staff, fellows, interns and colleagues through the Museums for America Program.

“This integrated initiative will nurture future conservators who can learn from VMFA’s rich and diverse holdings and high-caliber staff, while also ensuring that our colleagues across Virginia have access to the latest academic research and technical guidance,” said Stephen Bonadies, Senior Deputy Director for Conservation and Collections and VMFA’s Chief Conservator.

About the Susan and David Goode Center for Advanced Study in Art Conservation

VMFA developed the Susan and David Goode Center for Advanced Study in Art Conservation—the largest of its kind in the Southeast—to support strategic goals to increase new knowledge about its collection, ensure best practices for treating and preserving cultural properties under its care, and support professional development. The center generates cutting-edge scholarship relevant to multiple fields, while providing emerging professionals with hands-on training for successful art conservation careers. In this dynamic environment, VMFA’s conservators and curators collaborate with scientific specialists, art scholars, and global constituencies in research as diverse as radiographic imaging, materials analysis, and stylistic consideration.

In 2015, the Goode Conservation Center launched its first major pilot study to research and treat VMFA’s African art collection, which includes some 1,200 figures, masks, textiles, regalia and ritual objects from about 100 cultures across the continent. Funded through a \$1.5 million grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the project includes technical analyses of key works, including power objects, works in metal, and textiles. That initiative also includes a paid fellowship for one recent art conservation program graduate and four paid interships for first- and second-year college students.

About the Institute of Museum and Library Services

The Institute of Museum and Library Services is celebrating its 20th Anniversary. IMLS is the primary source of federal support for the nation’s approximately [123,000 libraries](#) and [35,000 museums](#). Its mission is to inspire libraries and museums to advance innovation, lifelong learning, and cultural and civic engagement. Its grant making, policy development, and research help libraries and museums deliver



valuable services that make it possible for communities and individuals to thrive. To learn more, visit www.ims.gov and follow IMLS on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#).

About the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts

The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in Richmond, Virginia, is one of the largest comprehensive art museums in the United States. VMFA, which opened in 1936, is a state agency and privately endowed educational institution. Its purpose is to collect, preserve, exhibit, and interpret art, and to encourage the study of the arts. Through the Office of Statewide Partnerships program, the museum offers curated exhibitions, arts-related audiovisual programs, symposia, lectures, conferences, and workshops by visual and performing artists. In addition to presenting a wide array of special exhibitions, the museum provides visitors with the opportunity to experience a global collection of art that spans more than 6,000 years. VMFA's permanent holdings encompass nearly 40,000 artworks, including the largest public collection of Fabergé outside of Russia, the finest collection of Art Nouveau outside of Paris, and one of the nation's finest collections of American art. VMFA is home to important collections of English silver and Impressionist, Post-Impressionist, British sporting, and modern and contemporary art, as well as renowned South Asian, Himalayan, and African art. In May 2010, VMFA opened its doors to the public after a transformative expansion, the largest in its 80-year history. The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts is the only art museum in the United States open 365 days a year with free general admission. For additional information, telephone 804-340-1400 or visit www.vmfa.museum.

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